

also affected Wilmington. To many in New Hanover County, the banking, tax, and railroad reforms all seemed targeted at Wilmington's Democratic and economic leaders. Many of the reforms directly affected the ability of the city's white leaders to prosper and manage the city's affairs for their own benefit.³¹

The legislature sought to make the municipal elections in Wilmington more egalitarian because, in the past, the Democratic Party held its members in office by failing to hold elections. The changes to the charter mandated that elections be held every two years. In March 1897, municipal elections were held in Wilmington for the first time in four years.³² Factions abounded in the city. For example, the Democratic Party was still split between the old line Democrats and those who were tired of seeing the same people in office who were also benefiting financially from their posts. The old line Democrats sought to solidify their party by pulling members together against the Republican threat, which was

the cities with a black voting majority such as Edenton, New Bern, Raleigh, Washington, Wilmington and Winston. Second to come under scrutiny were those that contained an even split between whites and blacks: Elizabeth City, Fayetteville, Oxford, and Rocky Mount. The last group of cities—Asheville, Concord, Durham, Goldsboro, Greenville, and Kinston—held white voting majorities. For a full detail of changes to Wilmington's charter, 1868 to 1910, see Appendix C. McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 459-461; Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics*, 124-131.

³¹ In banking, interest rates were lowered, thereby depriving banks of revenue. Taxation laws were changed to affect stockholders more directly. Railroad regulations were strengthened and effectively limited the ability of railroad magnates to capitalize on their holdings. McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 461.

³² According to the Board of Aldermen's minute book, the last municipal elections were held in 1893. Minutes, 1884-1898 (microfilm), Wilmington Board of Aldermen, State Archives, North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

perceived as interference in the everyday rights of citizens by the Republican legislature. Furthermore, the Democrats of the city planned a legal attack on the changes made to the city's election procedures. During the pre-election fiasco, both the Democrats and Republicans from each of the city wards traveled to Raleigh to appeal to Russell to appoint members from their factions to the new Board of Aldermen.³³

Russell's appointment of members to the Board of Aldermen was crucial to the political makeup of the board. Rumors circulated that he initially planned to nominate Democrats to the positions, but, after he found out that the Democrats planned to challenge the new city charter, he decided to fill the positions with Republicans. His final appointments were Silas P. Wright, D. J. Benson, Benjamin F. Keith, Andrew J. Hewlett, and John G. Norwood. Norwood was the only black appointee, and all were Republican with the exception of Keith, a disgruntled Democrat who was a member of the Silver Party. For the Board of Audit and Finance, Russell appointed C. W. Yates, H. C. McQueen, James H. Chadbourn Jr., H. A. DeCove, and John H. Webber. Of these, Webber was the only black member, Yates and McQueen the only Democrats, and the rest Republicans.³⁴

The March 1897 election for city officials went off without any problems. At the end of the day, two black Republicans, Andrew J. Walker and Elijah Green, were elected to the Board of Aldermen as were three Democrats, William E. Springer, Owen Fennell, and Walter E. Yopp. Therefore, the new Board of Aldermen was made up of 6 Republicans, 3 Democrats and 1 member of the Silver Party. On the evening after the polls closed, both the

³³ Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, 36 – 39.

³⁴ Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, 36 – 40; Crow, *Maverick Republican*, 97.